Board approves $4.8M for Enoch Pratt renovations

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. -- The Maryland Board of Public Works on Wednesday approved $4.8 million to complete design plans for a major renovation at Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Central Library. The plans call for preserving the original 1930s architecture while creating a 21st century library experience.

"This is the initial funding for the architectural firm to start with the planning, and to get the prints ready for construction," said Carla Hayden," the library's CEO.

Renovations to the 275,000-square-foot library would be completed in 2018, and it would remain open the entire time, Hayden said.

The renovations have been discussed for 20 years, Hayden said.

"It will provide the latest technology," Hayden said. "It will provide all kinds of training spaces for the other library systems throughout the state, so someone from Wicomico (County) could get their books delivered and also have the Internet connection, broadband, and all those types of things, so we've been waiting for a while but we're very excited now, because so much has changed."

The central library is designated as the State Library Resource Center, which allows materials and information to be shared with all Maryland residents.

Infrastructure improvements include a new information technology system, new bathrooms and elevators, as well as air conditioning and heating units. New security and fire protection systems also are part of the plans.

The Maryland General Assembly is considering appropriations for the next fiscal year to provide additional funding for the project. Funding requests also will be submitted to the Legislature for the three fiscal years beginning with fiscal year 2016.

The total cost for construction is expected to be $73 million. The overall cost of the project is estimated to be $99 million. Most of the money is coming from the state. The city of Baltimore is contributing $6 million.

The Maryland Department of General Services is managing the project.